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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE SINCERITY OF PROHIBITIONISTS

SIR,—Col. J. M. Gilmore, President of the National Model License League, in a letter published in a recent issue of the REVIEW, asks this question: "Don't you think that the prohibition movement has reached a point where its sincerity should be questioned and its leaders called upon to show cause for their demand for prohibition that is not intended to prohibit?"

Well, from the beginning of the prohibition movement until now the sincerity of prohibitionists has always been questioned by brewers, distillers, saloon-keepers, and politicians of all sorts who curry favor with the Liquor Interests. And it will be questioned as long as it lasts. If, at this point in its progress—for it is steadily progressing—there should be a more important questioning by the Model License League, it is because the liquor traffic is in more imminent peril than ever before—at this writing nineteen commonwealths have placed the traffic in intoxicating liquors under ban of constitutional or statutory law, and other States are contemplating similar radical legislation. Colonel Gilmore, of course, knows that his attempt to head off the movement by assailing the sincerity of its official leaders does not meet the real social, economic, industrial, political, and moral issues that are involved in the discussion.

In the first place, even if the leaders—such men as Bishop Wilson of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and other clergy—are not honest in their agitation for prohibitory laws; even if they have *not* intended to prevent the *use* of intoxicants (this is Colonel Gilmore's charge)—it is because they have been politically wise enough *not* to demand the enactment of sumptuary laws. If anything is settled in politics, this is settled—that government possesses power to control, regulate, or prohibit any traffic which is found to be inimical to the general welfare. Knowing this, the prohibition leaders have always confined their activities to legislation against a traffic which all civil courts have declared inimical to public welfare. And they have steadfastly adhered to this in spite of the fact that pro-liquor men have always charged them with attempting to secure the enforcement of sumptuary laws. Colonel Gilmore is simply criticising them for not doing that which he would have been one of the first to denounce as interference with personal liberty.

Colonel Gilmore questions the sincerity of the prohibition movement because an illicit traffic continues in spite of adverse legislation. But it continues in spite of the model license.

I happened to attend the first meeting of the Model License League Convention at Louisville, and I am quite willing to concede his sincerity—and that of such men as Mr. Atherton. In no other convention, even of prohibitionists, have I heard the lawless saloon more vigorously execrated. All the speakers agreed that the bad saloon did more harm to the liquor trade than prohibitionism—and they expressed the most fervent desire to get rid of it. So they accepted Colonel Gilmore's model license as an automatic method of eliminating the bad saloon-keeper and freeing the retail liquor traffic from its offensive features.

Colonel Gilmore came to Ohio during the sessions of the Constitutional Convention, and it is largely due to his influence that the convention and the electorate repudiated the tax law which had utterly failed to provide against evils consequent on the dram-shop traffic, and adopted the license system.

But, although less than three years have elapsed, the head of the Cuyahoga County Liquor Dealers' Association declares that in Cleveland alone there are 1,500 illicit saloons, that the police make no effort to enforce law, and that brewers and distillers furnish these "blind tigers" with beer and whisky on the same terms with the regularly licensed saloons. If preachers had made these statements, the police would have questioned their sincerity, but they are made by a liquor-dealer.

Similar conditions prevail in all other cities in the State.

I shall not express doubt of Colonel Gilmore's sincerity—but he ought to know, what all prohibitionists know, that the so-called lawless saloon—the dive—is always protected by the so-called law-abiding saloon. No prosecution of a dive has ever been instituted without arousing the trade to its defense. And no license system has yet moralized the saloon-keeper—and never will. The Prohibition party and the Anti-Saloon League have made no distinction between the dive and the Gold Dollar Cafe because there is no difference in the business. And they are consistent in their movement, because the trade is a unit everywhere.

The liquor traffic belongs in a class by itself. All civil courts have recognized that fact, and the Supreme Court of the United States has pronounced it devoid of all inherent right. Colonel Gilmore's model license itself is different from all other forms of license because it is granted on the assumption, or fact, that special restraints must be imposed upon the liquor traffic; that the interests of the community must be especially safeguarded. Granting that the imposition of such a license is constitutional, it must not be forgotten that the Supreme Court has decided that it is required *because* the liquor traffic is a source of crime and misery, and, by the exercise of a State's police power, may be absolutely prohibited without compensation; because the liquor-vender knows, or is supposed to know, that he has no inherent right to sell intoxicants under conditions of the retail trade, and that the right which the State grants may be revoked without redress.

Colonel Gilmore does not submit without protest to these decisions—but he ought not to think that he really deals fairly with the liquor problem when he questions the sincerity of prohibitionists, in view of the fact that they agree with the Supreme Court of the United States, and that the decisions of all courts are in their favor.

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